



The Phoenix Family Readiness Group Newsletter
1st Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Division (M)
Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07



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Once again, we greet you from Camp Taji. The battalion is still doing very well, working hard and being successful with whatever we've been tasked. We've made some huge steps in setting up the battalion and getting our rhythm down. We've had several big moments, marking another step closer to doing the work we were sent for. One of those significant events was the Battalion Transition of Authority Ceremony. This was the formal handover of the battle space from the outgoing unit to the incoming unit – us. We conducted a brief, professional ceremony to unfurl the Battalion Colors and take command of our Area of Operations (AO) Phoenix. It was a memorable event, both for the veterans and for the new soldiers.



Above: The 1st STB takes command of AO Phoenix and the Battalion Colors see Iraq for the first time in history.

experiences thus far. In addition to that, beginning this month we will start featuring a different section from the battalion in our Phoenix Spotlight Section. We have so many Soldiers working outside of their Primary Military Occupational Specialty (PMOS) that we'd like to give you a glimpse of their new jobs and just how well they are doing. For this issue, we'll highlight Task Force Ironclaw. We'll also include an interview with one of our Soldiers in "Soldier Spotlight" -- plus a short caption on some projects we've been doing with the local community. Hopefully at the end you'll see that our Soldiers are talented and intelligent, able to accomplish anything!

Your support has been outstanding thus far. For that we thank you and say – keep the mail coming!



Above: CSM Seaman providing his leadership to the First Sergeants.

The newsletter will take a bit of a new form this time around. We are going to change things up a little bit and allow CSM Seaman to tell you his perspective and

Command Sergeant Major Seaman “Phoenix 7”

Greetings to all – again – from Camp Taji, Iraq. We have finally settled down and are performing our mission. I want you all to know that our Soldiers (of all ranks) are performing brilliantly. We are getting along, taking care of each other, and being safe. The Soldier’s actions, conduct and professionalism have been truly amazing. The Special Troops Battalion is a very diverse organization. What that means to me is that we are everywhere and involved in every aspect of supporting the Raider Brigade. Our Soldiers are doing this without complaint; they are tough, hardened, experienced, and trained. I am proud of everything that they have accomplished. Please continue to support them with your letters, email, and packages.



Above: Eleven of our Soldiers received Army Commendation Medals from the Brigade Commander for their performance thus far.

The First Sergeant’s (1SGs) are being 1SGs; they are doing the best they can with what is available to make sure the Soldiers are taken care of. As a whole, the Non-Commissioned Officers are true professionals and technical experts in all they do. I rely on their knowledge and expertise daily to get things done.

The Officers are also performing well. They are commanding and leading their Soldiers with distinction. In fact, the best Officers in the Army are in the STB. In my 24 years of service, I’ve never seen a more dedicated, hard working cadre of Officers than what we have right now.



Above: Some of our Officers standing tall in formation.

When we are on patrol, our catch phrase is “Be polite, be professional, and be prepared.” I wish you could see our Soldiers interacting with the Iraqi people, especially the children. It is my belief that 99% of Iraqis just want to earn a living, raise their children, and provide for their families. While there are many cultural differences, we are alike in many ways. When we are handing out toys or small gifts to the children, I tell our Soldiers to look for the shy kid who hangs back and make sure they get something. I take great pleasure watching our Soldiers bring a little joy to a young boy or girl’s day. Anything our Soldiers do that makes someone smile or laugh is a success. There is a big picture of war over here, but our Soldiers are involved in many small things – one of them is simply being kind.



Above: Two of many adorable children that flood the streets when we come through.

To close, I'll end with a short story that happened to me recently when I was out on the road. I have learned that our difference in language can be a problem. I was talking with some young Iraqi men and I thought they had asked me how many children I had. I responded to them, "four." They all got excited and were laughing. The conversation was over and I walked away. I realized later that they had asked me how many wives I had...oh well, I messed that one up...

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SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT



Above: SPC Kevin Ferguson

For the first Soldier Spotlight, we'll introduce you to Specialist Kevin Ferguson. He is a native of San Jose, California, where his parents still reside. SPC Ferguson is 34 years old and is one of nine children in his family. He has a degree in Mass Communications from the University of California, Berkeley and enjoys writing song lyrics in his spare time. He's been in the Army for about a year and a half as an infantryman. He is currently serving as the S3's driver and a Radio Transmission Operator in our Battalion Tactical Operations Center. He's a motivated positive part of the Phoenix team and we're proud to introduce him to you.

A thought from SPC Ferguson:
 "Every American should serve in the United States Military. I know I made the right choice in joining the Army. We cannot buy honor but by serving in the United States Army we earn honor."

PHOENIX SPOTLIGHT

" TASK FORCE IRONCLAW "

One of the hottest topics across the brigade is "Who's got the Buffalo today?" Now, that might not mean a lot to you, but let me assure you, having the Buffalo go down your route is a big deal to the units here.

If you're not familiar with what a Buffalo is, I'll give you a brief idea. The Buffalo is an Engineer vehicle that is usually used for detecting mines. It has a small camera on the nose of the "claw" that will show what the claw is digging, and an observer's window to see what is in front of the vehicle. We use it here to locate and identify Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) before they locate us! Because there are so many IEDs emplaced on the routes

our Brigade travels, we have to go down the routes and clear them of explosives daily. This decreases the amount of IEDs that explode on our convoys, which is definitely a great thing.



ABOVE: SOLDIERS ON TASK FORCE IRONCLAW IN FRONT OF THE BUFFALO.

In the STB, we have developed a small team of 8 guys who go out day and night and clear the routes in our area. They have become very proficient at this, as they have already found four IEDs in just two weeks. On this team, we have three mechanics, one cook, one fueler, one communications guy, one infantryman and one engineer. Together, they make a motivated and very competent group that courageously clears the way for our Soldiers to accomplish their mission.

So if you're out and someone talks about a Buffalo, you'll know that its not just a giant brown animal, it's a great piece of equipment that your Soldiers operate to save other Soldier's lives.

LOCAL PROJECTS

Currently, there are several building projects in progress in a local community called Assyria, not far from Camp Taji. All

of these projects will foster a safer and more economically independent community. Coupled with future scheduled projects these will be a part of a community wide effort to create a secure Assyria. The STB works to coordinate and pay contractors to complete these projects for the local area. Ultimately we are setting up functioning towns to foster education, independence and positive growth.

One of the biggest ongoing projects is a women's center. The goal of this project is to provide Iraqi women a special center for learning and honing basic homemaking skills. The project was started in November of 2005 and is expected to be complete by November of 2006. This women's center will impact about 2,000 women in the local area and is currently employing about 20 local citizens.



Above: CPT Castillo and SPC Fitu at one of the local projects.

Another project, and perhaps the most important one in the area, is the reconstruction of a couple local schools. One of the schools that is being refurbished is the IBN HAJAR School. In addition to refurbishment, an extra classroom is being added in order to provide more operating space for the teachers and children. We take for granted that American children get such nice schools with hardly any effort from us.

Not only have these projects increased the standard of living for the local community, but they have also contributed to the overall happiness of the citizens and functionality of the area. That makes a big difference in how they treat us and whether or not they support our being there. Citizens are taking ownership of the land and a sense of pride has been established in their hearts for their own town.

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I along with the CSM are very proud of what your soldiers are doing here in Iraq. They are making huge differences daily in the lives of many, many people. In addition to providing a helping hand through local projects we are also helping the Iraqi police forces and Iraqi Army provide security in our area of operations. We recently completed our first joint operation “King Tut” with elements of the new Iraqi Army. It was very successful and is indicative of the way our forces will operate this year in Iraq. We will continue to update and change the format of this newsletter to better reflect all of the myriad tasks that the battalion is doing and spotlight soldiers and units within the Special Troops Battalion.

Thanks for your support. My office is near the battalion mail room and it is a great to see the look on our soldier’s faces as they get packages and letters from home. Your soldiers often talk about what is happening at home and share favorite things from their packages with others. I like to share Community Coffee from New Orleans and Atomic Fireballs. Others have shared with me homemade beef jerky, pull taffy, hard candies, and candied jalapenos. Keep the packages and letters coming. Your support is much appreciated and never forgotten.



To Dare Is To Do

Larry A. Seaman
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army

John W. Cross
LTC, EN
Commanding



Above: LTC Cross reenlisting SPC Cool out on the battlefield.